

Sketch

Volume 40, Number 3

1975

Article 22

The Night Life

L. Conley Brown*

*Iowa State University

Copyright ©1975 by the authors. *Sketch* is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
<http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch>

The Night Life

by L. Conley Brown
Psychology, Sophomore

THE man walked down the narrow night street, fading in and out of the haze, smiling to himself.

"Nothing to it," he said quietly. The wind carried his hollow voice and it seeped into the crannies of the huddled buildings and the cobblestones underfoot.

"Fools!" He laughed out loud. A lone drunk staggering up the street heard the strange howling echo and lurched desperately for the door to a dimly lit pub, babbling incoherently.

Desmond, watching from the blackness, howled again, stretching his head backwards and upwards toward the night sky. Dull, low-hanging curtains of clouds were sliced in places by small fields of stars reaching on to eternity. In defiance he sent his voice and mind groping for the same goal, and felt himself flung back to earth, denied entrance. His face contorted, hate twisting his handsome features into the face of a soul-tortured and bent upon vengeance. He smiled bitterly.

Curling his lip he said, "The fools," and continued up the street, his eyes searching each corner.

The same night sky threatened to smother Charlotte Samuels, not in hate or revenge, but rather as a grey slab of heavy brass weighing down on her and mirroring the bleakness of her own life.

She waited patiently beneath the lamp post, knowing that the right type invariably came for those who waited. So many had come. And gone.

But not really gone. No one who felt her kiss was ever really gone. Remorse constricted her chest and she sighed to unbind her muscles.

Each time she had found someone, she had thought it was the spell that would break her curse and free her to laugh and cry and love like other women and finally to complete the circle and die. But always it was the same—only a few hours and it was gone. The illusion fled in the face of ugly reality. Only a few moments really, if one counted it in relation to the rest of her life.

Her chin quivered, but no tear drops formed in her blue-black eyes. They never did, she never cried.

The wind was getting colder, but she didn't notice. Her grey-white skin was always icy. Her lips were touched with frost, and her eyes cold yet burning in her head. The wind dipped by her and swirled her brown locks around her neck and across her face.

Absent-mindedly, with her eyes cemented to a figure approaching her, she brushed it from her face. And instinctively, she stiffened. She knew this was the one.

Almost choking on the bubble of excitement that rose into her bare throat, she arranged her hair and smoothed her skirt, listening to the satisfying swish of it on the street.

Then she studied the sky in obvious disinterest of the rest of the world, and waited.

Desmond had spotted her a few blocks back and had decided that she was perfect for the role he needed in the bizarre playlet that was to be performed tonight. The same drama had played countless nights before and would be performed in the future with only slight revisions in the scenery and moderate changes in the dialogue. The only true alteration being in the casting of the leading lady.

As Desmond approached her, he smiled hypnotically. She returned his smile, seemingly unaffected by the underlying power behind it.

"My dear," he said, slightly puzzled by the ineffectuality of his power on her, "what keeps you out so late on a cold night?"

Charlotte gave him her most dazzling smile.

"Perhaps the thought of finding a friend." She lowered her eyes, and her smile held a touch of sadness. "The people in a big city are so . . ." she gestured vaguely, "impersonal." She looked up at him again and said in a honeyed tone, "Friends are hard to come by."

"My thoughts exactly. Perhaps we could share experiences and a walk down by the quays?"

Charlotte nearly jumped. This one was so easy. He even made the suggestion without any urging on her part. She accepted casually and as they moved off, arm in arm, she was rejoicing that it should be so easy tonight when she was weighed down by the cross of the past leaning heavily on her shoulders.

Desmond was pleased on his own part. The quays were his favorite grounds, and as such, they were familiar territory. The body could always be dumped into one of the old trollers or even the sea.

Caution, Desmond's mind told him. One was found there just last week. There would be police near the quay, hoping he would come back. Caution above all else. For while they were fools, there were times when fools could be incredibly lucky.

"Your name, lovely lady?" Desmond always found out their names so he could look for them in the newspapers in the following editions. He usually found them in the front page headlines or in the obituaries. The thought made him smile to himself.

"Charlotte Samuels, sir. And yours?" Charlotte hated to know her men's names. It signified more than the relationship she had to maintain. It implied an acquaintance; when you discovered someone's name, it was like wedging a foot into the door to their soul. Charlotte hated that more than anything else. It was unbearably painful because she knew what had to be in the end. The denouement was always the same; it had even gone so far as to be tradition.

"Desmond Errol. No relation to the Errols of Essex," he added quickly. It was better not to leave any traces or

divulge any histories. After all, it only took one mistake. "Actually, I'm not a native at all."

"I could tell," Charlotte nodded. "You're much too amiable to be English."

"Are you from London, Charlotte?"

"I wasn't born here, but this has been my country for many years." She sighed. "Eons, in fact." She turned to him. "Do you have any idea of what it's like to have a life that goes on forever the same. To see the same streets, the same blank, faceless mobs, the same cries and rattlings and ravings. The only purpose in life is to wait for death."

"Is there in death no solace?" Desmond said softly. Then he started in surprise, wondering what had come over him.

"Poetry, Desmond?"

"Yes," he said, rather irritated at the turn of events; things were not progressing as he had planned.

The quays were misty, and poorly lighted when they arrived. The old ships loomed up against the grey night sky, tipping and creaking as they protested the movements of their old joints over the swelling and ebbing of the sea. The wind whistled over the waves, and they in turn slapped against the rocks in answer.

Desmond felt his surety return, and he felt one with the night. They walked on in silence.

The need began to grow, expanding from inside him, until he thought he would explode with it. Blood lust gnawed at his mind.

He turned to face her. His glinting eyes transfixed themselves on her fragile throat, so easily bruised.

Charlotte looked at him fearfully. It's not time yet, she thought wildly. Not so soon. He shouldn't look like that so soon!

"You hate life, my dear?" he said softly, but his voice was harsh. "You don't know what good fortune you have. To hate death you must be alive."

He bent over her, holding her by her shoulders. She made no move to run.

"You long for death?" He laughed out loud and it

seemed as if the entire scene froze in horror at the sound. Silence prevailed broken only by the rasping of his voice. "I will give you death. But not for long. Death will claim you only as a part time guest, like a fickle lover. I am death!"

His face loomed before her. The eyes were swollen and fiery, the face contorted. The lips parted as he smiled, revealing gleaming white teeth; the two incisors swollen to almost twice their normal size.

Charlotte gasped and her eyes widened as the realization hit.

"I am," and the night wind seemed to pick up his voice and fling it into the sky, "I am death..."

Charlotte threw her head backwards and laughed. Startled, Desmond released her and she fell backwards on the beach, and continued laughing. He stood there astounded until she composed herself and looked up at him contritely.

"I'm sorry," she said sincerely. "Truly I am. But the irony of it all!" She looked down for a few moments, then looked up and smiled at him.

Desmond stepped back a pace, even more astounded.

"You mean," he sputtered, "You?"

Charlotte nodded, still smiling. "Isn't it wonderful we found each other?"

Desmond helped her up. "Yes, I suppose in a way it is."

At that moment, a constable appeared from behind one of the old fishing boats. He was a young man, obviously Cockney born.

"Come on," he called over his shoulder. "It's just a young man wit 'is missus."

Two others slunk out and stood behind the first.

"Sorry to be disturbin' ye ma'am," he said touching his grimy cap, "but I've just been newly hired to guard this area here and I don't want to lose my job. I just heard voices so I had to come and investigate."

"We understand," Charlotte said kindly.

"You're the first we've seen tonight, and that's a

fact," one of the others said. "This used to be quite the place for, uh, walkin' and such. Before them awful murders."

The third one crossed himself quickly and added, "Aye, Terrible things they was. And women every one."

"And the police never figured out how neither. There was never a mark on 'em," the first said.

"Except the Devil's Kiss," the third man affirmed, glancing around him in the darkness. "Ain't no ordinary murderer they be lookin' for. Tis one o' the devil's creatures out of Hell."

"They say," the other man whispered, "it's one o' the livin' dead!" He swallowed loudly. "A vampire!"

"Don't be ridiculous," Desmond said, measuring the combined strength of himself and Charlotte against the three men. It might prove to be a memorable evening after all. He turned and gave Charlotte a smile and a slow nod. "Don't be ridiculous," he repeated. "There are no such things."